

Jimmy Carter House
209 Woodland Drive
Plains
Sumter County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-244

HABS,
GA,
131-PLAIN,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

Addendum to
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JIMMY CARTER HOUSE

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2-

Location: 209 Woodland Dr. (West Side), Plains, Sumter County, Georgia.

USGS Plains Georgia Quadrant, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: Zone 16, E 74S380 N 3547120.

Present Owner/Occupant: Mr. and Mrs. James Earl Carter, Jr.

Present Use: Private residence.

Significance: This is the first and only home the Carters have owned, and it has been the permanent residence of the family since 1961. The Carters residence in this modest 1960s ranch-style house corresponds with the highlights of Jimmy Carter's political career from state senator (1963-71) to governor of Georgia (1971-75) to thirty-ninth president of the United States (1977-81).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1961.
2. Architect: Hugh Gaston. Gaston was born in Gastonburg, Alabama, in 1924 and was educated at Auburn University. A member of the Georgia chapter of the American Institute of Architects, most of Gaston's buildings are located in Georgia.¹ After designing this house for the Carters, Gaston received several more commissions in Plains, including the design of a home for Hugh Alton Carter, Jimmy Carter's cousin (early 1960s); the Carter Peanut Warehouse office, (1961); the Pond House, built by the Carters (1968) for Jimmy's mother, Lillian; and the additions and improvements to the Plains Convalescent Home, formerly the Wise Sanitarium (1978). In 1978, Gaston severed his association with the AIA and moved to Lebanon, Tennessee.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Carters have owned the house since it was built. It is located on 2.4 acres that they purchased from Homer M. Harris on April 7, 1960 (Deed Book 62, page 117).
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Plains resident and builder Ralph Wiggins was the general contractor; supplies were purchased from G.A. Tye and

¹ American Architect's Directory, p. 240.

Sons of Americus, Shiver Lumber Company in Americus, and the Sullivan Lumber Company of Dumas, Georgia. Junior Abbett of Abbett Construction Company in Americus, was the general contractor for the additions made in 1974.

5. Original plans and construction: Architectural drawings dated September 30, 1960 include floor plans, elevations, cross sections of walls and materials. The Carters have on display in the house a colored-pencil drawing of the building signed by Hugh Gaston and dated June 24, 1960.
6. Alterations and additions: In 1974 several major alterations were undertaken. The screened-in porch on the north end of the family room was enclosed to create a sun porch with many windows and a sliding-glass door. Also, the garage was converted into an office and a new two-story garage was built on to the rear of the original garage. Separate from the house, it is connected to the house by a covered walk. An apartment on the second floor is used by the Carters as a guest room for visiting family and friends. All alterations were designed by the firm of Hugh Gaston; original plans for the alterations are dated January, 16 1974.

When the Carters returned to Plains in 1981 after living in the White House, they installed a tongue-and-groove floor in the attic² and converted the first floor of the new garage into a woodworking shop. Also in the early 1980s, the wall between the master bedroom and the adjacent bedroom to the south was removed to enlarge the former and create a small dressing room on the south side of the bedroom. Amy Carter and her parents installed a pine floor in her bedroom in 1981.

- B. Historical Context: After several profitable years in the peanut business, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter had saved enough money to buy a house. They tried to convince R.E. Sullivan to sell them the house they were renting on the outskirts of Plains (see HABS No. GA-2205). He refused, so they hired Hugh Gaston to design a house for them on a wooded plot of land on the edge of town. It was the first home the Carters owned and it was designed so that it could be expanded. During their early years in the house, the peanut warehouse continued to thrive and Jimmy Carter became more involved in civic affairs. He served on the county library board and hospital authority, and acted as president of the Certified Seed Organization, district governor of Lions International, chairman of the local planning commission, and president of the Georgia Planning Association Commission.³

Carter recalls that his most political association at this time, however,

² Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, Everything to Gain, 1987, p. 14.

³ Jimmy Carter, Why Not the Best?, 1975, p. 79.

was as chairman of the local school board. His greatest effort on the board was to promote the consolidation of the county schools, for which he made speeches throughout the county. Carter decided to run for the state senate seat, representing seven counties in southwest Georgia, in 1962. The election was wrought with corruption on his opponent's part, but upon Carter's insistence, ballots were recast and Carter won the seat by 1,500 votes. This experience gave him new insight into the pitfalls of the American political system and a desire to gain greater power to implement change.⁴ He ran for governor in 1966 but lost in the primaries. In 1967, he began a second campaign for governor, finally winning the seat in 1970. Also in 1967, Amy Carter was born.

From 1970 to 1981, the Carters spent little time at their Woodland Drive home, living first in the governor's mansion, and finally, the White House. The house was the site of interviews and meetings with vice presidential candidates and cabinet hopefuls, and served as a haven during their visits to Plains during vacations.

After Carter's defeat in the 1980 presidential race, he and Rosalynn returned to Plains. Both remember the homecoming as a painful one, but they passed the first several months repairing the house which for eleven years had been virtually unoccupied.⁵ Soon they found many meaningful ways to fill their time. Jimmy Carter began planning the presidential library to be erected in Atlanta, and they began writing their memoirs. Carter set up a woodworking shop in the garage (they no longer needed a car because the Secret Service provided transportation) with tools given to him as a farewell gift by his Washington staff. The Carters remain politically and socially active, maintaining many of the ties they made during the presidency. Since returning to Plains, they continue to entertain prominent guests, such as Anwar Sadat and his wife, in their home. The house is filled with White House memorabilia and gifts from foreign dignitaries.

A Secret Service staff housed in an adjacent building ensures their protection. The house became part of the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site in 1988, and will become government property at the end of the Carter's lives.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Typical of a modest, one-story, 1960s ranch house, the Carter dwelling emphasizes comfort and informality.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

⁴ Carter, 1975, pp. 85-86.

⁵ Carter, 1987, p. 14.

1. Overall dimensions: This one-story ranch-style house consists of three, side-facing gable sections. A front-facing gable wing extends west from the center block and houses a family room and sun porch. A smaller side-facing gable section on the south originally served as a garage, but is now an office. The front/east facade has nine bays. The first two bays include the 26' garage/office. The third bay encompasses the 17'-8" gabled section comprising the dining room and kitchen. The fourth and fifth bays make up the 20'-4" central gabled block that projects 4'-8" forward and is slightly taller than the adjacent sections. The northernmost gabled section includes the last four bays. It is 37'-4" and houses the bedrooms.
2. Foundations: Subterranean concrete foundation. 12" x 12" brick piers behind the brick veneer support the north gable end where the floor is about 3-1/2' above grade. There are three 16" x 8" vents in the foundations on the east and west facades of the northernmost gabled section, and two on the north facade. The sun porch foundation on the west side is also brick with a soldier-course watertable.
3. Walls: Walls are red common-bond brick and vertical board-and-batten painted light green. Brick clads the entire east facade, as well as the north and west sides of the northernmost gable section. The garage/office is clad entirely in wood, as is the west gable-end of the family room wing and the west side of the south gable section. The exposed gable-ends of the central section, where they extend above the rooflines of the adjacent sections, are also clad in wood.
4. Structural system, framing: Wood frame. Brick walls consist of 4" common bond brick veneer over wood frame. The frame of 2" x 4" studs spaced 16" on center are faced with 1/2" waterproof sheathing. The brick is attached to the wood frame by staggered metal ties 16" on center vertically and 32" on center horizontally. Board-and-batten walls have 1" x 3" battens 16" on center with a 3/8" asbestos board over a 1/2" waterproof sheathing between the exterior walls and the frame.
The roof is supported on 2" x 6' rafters 16" on center.
5. Porches, stoops,: A central, recessed porch created by a continuous roof slope shelters the front entrance on the east facade. A door in the second bay of the north facade has an elevated brick stoop with a terra cotta floor. A parallel run of three steps running west to east approaches the stoop.
A raised, L-shaped brick patio behind the house covers the area between the back of the house and the garage.
6. Chimneys: One large interior chimney serves the fireplace in the family

room in the central section. Constructed of common-bond brick, it has a rowlock cap topped with a concrete wash coping and houses a 16" x 16" flue.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is a 5'-0" x 6'-8" opening containing two 1-3/4" solid-core flush doors flanked by five-light sidelights. A 1-3/4" flush solid-core door in the first bay of the north facade leads to Amy Carter's bedroom. The south facade of the garage originally had an identical door, but this, as well as the garage door, have been removed and walled-in. A back entrance leading from the back hall to the porch was added when the garage was converted to an office; it contains a single, two-panel, nine-light door. A small opening for the cat in the lower right corner of this door was blocked off after too many squirrels and raccoons tried to enter the house. Sliding-glass doors lead from the north wall of the sun porch onto the patio.
- b. Windows and shutters: The largest concentration of windows is in the sun porch on the west side of the house. Originally, this area was a screened-in porch, but in 1974 the screens were replaced with full-height fixed glazing. Three large windows face south onto the patio to form continuous glazing. Likewise, the west facade of the sun porch is almost entirely glazed, with two pairs of fixed windows and a large sliding-glass door.

The rest of the fenestration consists of three basic types of windows. In the central gabled section on the east facade, windows are all 6'-2", eight-over-twelve-light double-hung sash. A bank of three such windows forms the third bay of the front facade. The central gabled area projects from the facade, forming the recessed entry and a bay with a 6'-2", fixed thirty-six-light window flanked by two eight-over-twelve-light sash windows. Each side of the bay features a window; one faces north, the other south. Double windows over the kitchen sink on the south side of the southernmost gable section are 3'-2", eight-over-eight-light, double-hung wood sash. Single windows identical to these are located in each of the bathrooms with exterior walls, in the seventh bay of the east facade, the second bay of the north facade, and on the west wall of the southernmost gabled section facing the patio. The original plan included two such windows on the back wall, but the southernmost window was replaced with a door leading to the patio when the house was renovated in 1974. The remaining windows are 4'-2", eight-over-eight-light, double-hung sash located singly in the first, second, eighth, and ninth bays of the east facade; in pairs in sixth bay of the east

facade and the second bay of the west facade; and in a bank of three in the first bay of the west facade. All fenestration on the front facade, as well as the kitchen windows on the south facade, have wood louvered shutters painted beige. The bathroom windows in the seventh bay of the east facade and the second bay of the north facade have wood louvered shutters that cover the entire window and are connected at the top of the window frame by a hinge and can be pushed out.

8. Roof

- a. Shape, covering: The shallow cross-gable roof is covered with beige asphalt shingles. Although the roofline is broken on the east side of the house because of the taller projecting central-gable section, the roofline on the west side is continuous.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The wide eaves extend about 2' from the house. Eaves are open throughout, except for the central gabled section over the front stoop where they are boxed. The 3/8" plywood soffits have continuous aluminum screen vents. All fascia and exposed rafters are painted beige.
- c. Cupolas: A small hexagonal cupola is situated atop the center of the garage roof with louvered vents on three sides and a weathervane on top.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The five distinct gabled blocks visible on the exterior correspond to the five basic interior spaces of the house. The central projecting gabled section covers an entrance foyer and a 12'-4" x 18'-8" living room. A door on the south wall of the foyer leads to the 16'-6" x 11'-10" dining room. Behind the dining room is a 16'-6" x 7'-8" kitchen. The area behind the kitchen is divided into a small breakfast nook to the north and a hallway to the south, which leads south behind the kitchen to the garage. A door on the north side of the west wall of this hall leads to a bathroom; a large opening at the south end of the wall leads to a foyer with a doorway that opens onto the patio. This foyer was once a laundry room with two windows, until the southernmost window was converted into a door in 1974. The hall leads to the small gabled section that was formerly a garage and is now Jimmy Carter's office. This 22'-8" x 20'-8" room has a small nook in the south side of the west wall. A large closet adjacent to the nook serves as a storage area. West of the central block, behind the living room and foyer, is a 19'-6" x 24'-8" family room with an exposed-truss roof. Three large openings in the west wall of the family room lead to the 19'-6" x 12'-2"

sun porch. The bedrooms are located in the northernmost block of the house. Originally the house had four bedrooms: two facing east, two facing west. The 11'-4" x 14'-0" bedroom in the southeast corner has been converted into Rosalynn's office; the master bedroom west of the hall was expanded to the south, and what was a 13'-0" x 11'-4" bedroom in the southwest corner now serves as Rosalynn's dressing room. Amy's 17'-6" x 14'-0" bedroom is in the northeast corner. Between Amy's bedroom and Rosalynn's office are two back-to-back bathrooms, one opening to the hall and the other to Amy's space. A fourth bath is connected to the master bedroom at the north end of the house.

2. Flooring: The foyer floor is the same brick pattern used on the front landing, back patio, sun porch, and in Jimmy Carter's office. Because Jimmy's office was built as a garage, it originally had a concrete floor. The living room, dining room, bedrooms, and hall floors are covered with light-blue wall-to-wall carpeting. Only Amy's bedroom has hardwood floors; Oriental carpets are placed throughout the house. The kitchen and hall leading to the office/garage have vinyl tiles over rubber; and the breakfast nook and family room are terrazzo over wood. All bathrooms have ceramic-tile floors.

3. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls throughout are either covered with 1/2" gypsum board, or 4" tongue-and-groove wood paneling; except for the walls above the windows in the sun porch, which are 2" tongue-and-groove boards painted bright pink. The wood paneling in the family room, breakfast nook, and Amy's bedroom are varnished a warm brown color. In Rosalynn's dressing room, the paneling is painted white; in her office, yellow.

Most of the walls covered with gypsum board are covered with wall paper. The Carter's recently redecorated and repapered the house. The walls in the dining room are a rich melon color with blue and white draperies. The kitchen is covered with blue and white wallpaper. Jimmy Carter's office is covered with a beige cloth paper. The master bedroom is papered with a subtle floral pattern that is echoed in the fabric of the curtains, bedspread, and upholstery. The hall to the bedrooms has approximately 3' wood-panel wainscoting and the rest of the walls are covered with a floral-patterned paper. Amy's bathroom and the bathroom adjoining the hall have peach-colored wallpaper and green tile.

The ceilings throughout the house are gypsum board except for the sun porch, which has a tongue-and-groove paneled ceiling; the family room, which is paneled with three exposed trusses; and the converted office/garage, which is plywood.

4. Doorways and doors: All doors are standard 6'-8" tall. The doors between the bedrooms and hall are flush hollow core. A similar door

separates the hall from the family room. Doors to the bathrooms and smaller closets are flush hollow core. Bedroom closet doors, as well as the doors between the foyer and the dining room and between the family room and the breakfast nook, are 1-3/8" wood double bifold louvers. The door between the family room and the foyer is a bifold, flush, hollow core.

5. Decorative features and trim: The house has various built-in features such as bookshelves and cabinets that span the entire east wall of the family room and a television cabinet beneath the opening to the kitchen on the south wall of the family room. Double and single door cabinets comprise the entire east wall of the hall running south to Jimmy Carter's office. In the office, a row of approximately 4' high cabinets run the length of the south wall; likewise, the small office in the southwest corner of the house is lined from floor to ceiling on three walls with bookshelves. Amy Carter's bedroom also has built-in bookshelves on the west and south walls, and the master bedroom has built-in bookshelves and cabinets on the south wall. The breakfast nook has a built-in table with padded benches running along the west and south walls.
6. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: An electric furnace and air-conditioning unit heat and cool the building, respectively. The unit is located west of the house behind the master bedroom; and the ducts are located on the floors along the perimeter of each room. The sun porch is served by a separate air-conditioning unit in the north wall. Louvered vents with aluminum screens located at the gable ends on the north and south, as well as over the sun-porch gable on the west vent the attic. The office/garage also has a louvered vent on its south gable in addition to the vented cupola tower in the center of the roof.
 - b. Lighting: All rooms have electric ceiling fixtures. Track lighting has been installed in the family room and the sun porch where the central ceiling fixture has been replaced with a fan.
 - c. Plumbing: Two bathrooms, with a sink and toilet each, are located off the hall leading to Jimmy Carter's office and between Amy's bedroom and Rosalynn's office. The master bathroom has a tub and shower unit, toilet, and two sinks; the bathroom off Amy's room a toilet, sink, and shower. The fixtures in Amy's bathroom, as well as the adjoining bathroom, are dark green. The kitchen has double sinks with a single faucet and an additional sink is located in Rosalynn's dressing room.

- d. Telephones: The Carters have four telephones; in the kitchen, master bedroom, and both offices. Each telephone has a direct line to the Secret Service house, and those in the bedroom and Jimmy Carter's office have "panic buttons" for emergencies.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house is situated in a densely wooded lot on the west side of Plains. The only house on Woodland Drive, it is set back from the road and faces east. The Carters also own about 4.5 acres on the west side of Woodland Drive that is landscaped as an open field with a large pond. An asphalt driveway leads from the road to the garage on the south. Flower beds line the south wall of the sun porch and the west wall of the breakfast nook. A walkway covered with corrugated green fiberglass supported on wood posts links the door on the west facade to the door on the east facade of the garage. West of the house is a tennis court, and west of it is an area enclosed by a wire fence where the Carter's two hunting dogs are kept.
2. Outbuildings:
 - a. Garage/woodshop: A detached two-story garage was constructed in 1974 when the original garage was converted into Jimmy's office. The 29'-6" x 30'-0" front-facing gable structure has a large utilitarian door on the south facade. The walls are board-and-batten, identical to those of the house; the floor is concrete slab. A flight of stairs on the north facade runs east to west to the second-floor apartment.
 - b. Security structures: Two small structures situated northwest and southeast of the house serve as posts for security guards. The square, hipped-roof structures are painted to match the house and are glazed on all four sides. A tall metal security fence (from Richard Nixon's estate) separates the Carter's home from Woodland Drive. The Secret Service team that protects the Carters is based in a Victorian house about 200' south of the Carter's house.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: Floor plans, elevations, and sections by Hugh Gaston of Albany, September 30, 1960; Plans for alterations and additions, include the covered walkway, garden fence, sun porch, conversion of the garage to an office, and the construction of the new garage, also by Hugh Gaston, January 16, 1974. Copies of both are on file at Andersonville National Historic

Site, Andersonville, Georgia.

B. Early Views: Drawing by Hugh Gaston, June 24, 1960, at the Carter House.

C. Interviews:

Ralph Wiggins, general contractor, interview by Elizabeth Barthold, August 23, 1989, Plains, Georgia.

Junior Abbett, general contractor for 1974 additions, telephone interview by Elizabeth Barthold, August 1989.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: Deed books are from the Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.

2. Secondary and published sources:

American Architects Directory, edited by George S. Koyl, New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1962.

Carter, Jimmy, Why Not the Best?, Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1975.

Carter, Jimmy and Rosalynn, Everything to Gain: Making the Most of the Rest of Your Life, New York: Random House, 1987.

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